

LET'S
GET

ROWDY!

MAY DAY 2018

IGAINESVILLE

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Table of Contents

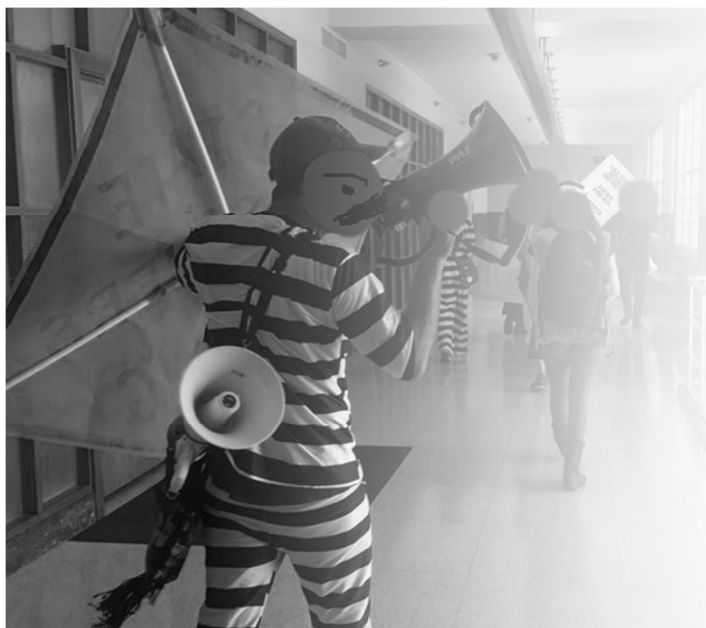
Letter from the Editor.....	3
May Day in Gainesville.....	4
Lake Worth Reportback.....	6
Broward May Day.....	8
Tampa Report by Dr Bones.....	10





Happy May Day to all us rowdy anarchists and socialists and communists and everyone else who took to the streets on May 1st! In four locations across Florida, communities gathered together to make some noise and have some fun. In Broward, we marched along the newly renamed Freedom, Hope, and Liberty streets, which used to bear the names of Confederate generals. In Tampa we marched for 15 and spoke out against capitalism. In Gainesville we raised hell against slave prison labor used at UF, and in Palm Beach we got rowdy in demanding justice for immigrants. This May Day we found solidarity among all branches of leftism, we fought for more than just immigrant rights or for better pay, we fought for all of those things together and more, understanding the interconnectedness of all oppression and inequality that forms under capitalism.

This special edition covers the four events that happened around Florida, with articles from Fight Toxic Prisons, Dr. Bones, anonymous comrades and many more organizations and individuals. We are overjoyed to be bringing you these stories and pictures. Florida is a special place, at once filled to the brim with capitalism but also filled with powerful rebellious spirit. We are split down the middle in many ways, with south Florida being a Democratic powerhouse and the north being Republican, but as leftists we are united all over this state, and the world. Don't let this May Day flame burn out, let's keep it lit until next year we do it all over again!



May Day in Gainesville!

By Gainesville
IWW

Anarchists, socialists, labor activists, prison abolitionists, and others took to the streets of Gainesville to honor the history of working class struggle against the boss class and express solidarity with immigrants and incarcerated workers on Tuesday, May 1st.

This year's Gainesville May Day festivities kicked off with an action organized by the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) and Fight Toxic Prisons (FTP) to highlight local institutions' reliance on unpaid labor provided by the prison industrial complex. Activists dressed in prison stripes carried banners, picket signs, drums, megaphones, and a large orange roadsign that had been modified to read "SLAVE Prisoners Working" into the University of Florida's admissions office and raised hell, demanding that the University, as well as the City of Gainesville and Alachua County, stop relying on prisoner labor for groundskeeping and other work.

From the UF campus action, about 80 activists representing the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Socialist Alternative (SA), the Alachua County Labor Coalition, and other groups formed up at "Protest Corner," University Avenue and 13th Street. The march kicked off at around 5 p.m. and snaked about a mile through rush-hour traffic to Bo Diddley Plaza in downtown Gainesville.

At the Plaza, a crowd of around 200 folks ate, drank, and made merry while listening to local musical acts and speakers. Grassroots progressive and radical groups including the Dream Defenders, the Labor Coalition, National Women's Liberation (NWL), IWW, IWOC, FTP, SA, Democratic Socialists of America, and others had info and merch tables set up around the perimeter of the plaza. Speakers from IWOC, NWL, Madres Sin Fronteras, and other groups connected the dots and made the case for a people's uprising--not just against the policies of the ultra-nationalist, fascist-coddling Trump regime, but against the whole racist, immigrant-bashing, war-mongering system that pits working class people against each other here and abroad, all for the benefit of the bosses and their servants in the political sphere.

Last year, brave immigrant organizers from Madres Sin Fronteras (MSF) were the focus of our May Day rally. This local, women-led organization pulled out all the stops, with multiple speakers addressing everything from harassment on the job, to threats of arrest and deportation from ICE, to bullying in public schools faced by immigrant workers and their families. They even brought in a fantastic mariachi band to entertain the crowd. This year, with the noose of Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention and deportation activities tightening around the region and slowly zeroing in on Gainesville, only one organizer from MSF spoke. She issued an urgent call for support and participation as they organize to defend the community against further attacks on people's livelihoods and families by ICE.

This year, building on the action at UF, much of the focus was on IWOC/FTP and their support for the ongoing wave of uprisings, strikes, and other resistance in prisons here in Florida and around the country. Organizers are working to build momentum for the prisoner-led nationwide Juneteenth day of actions, which will itself be a prelude to the nationwide prisoner strike called for August 21st through September 9th of this year. The strike, called by Jailhouse Lawyers Speak and other prison abolitionist groups, will be the next step in the fight to end prison slavery and ultimately abolish prisons as we know them altogether. For more info on how you and your group can get involved and take action, check out the articles and updates at iwoc.org or on the Supporting Prisoners and Real Change (SPARC) page on Facebook.

Solidarity was the name of the game this year, as it is at every Gainesville May Day rally. The North Central Florida Central Labor Council of the AFL-CIO provided funding to help with the rental of the plaza and other expenses. Our local infoshop, the Civic Media Center (which is also our union hall!) provided many of the tables and chairs for groups to set up their info booths with. Gainesville's Socialist Alternative chapter helped organize and promote the march.

Since its chartering in 1998, the Gainesville General Membership Branch of the IWW has been the main bottomline group that organizes each May Day's festivities, but we couldn't do it without the support and active participation of many other organizations. May Day is about working class solidarity. It is about getting organized, and staying organized, and staying in the fight. It is a day to remember and mourn our dead--from the Haymarket Martyrs onward--and to renew our commitment to do as Mother Jones said and "fight like hell for the living!" Here in Gainesville, Juneteenth will surely be one peak of action in another long hot summer. See y'all in the streets...





Report from May Day actions in Lake Worth, Florida. By Anonymous, via IGD

Lake Worth, Florida, is a small and strange beach town. Surrounded by some of the grossest examples of capitalism and greed and located just two miles from Trump's winter white house, it is also home to an extremely high poverty rate, more undocumented folks than Las Vegas (a city 20 times its size), and despite not having its own police department, more cops (county Sheriffs) than most folks have seen anywhere else on Turtle Island.

In addition to all this, Lake Worth and the surrounding areas are also home to an absurd amount of radicals-per-capita. There is a fairly large group of anarchists, there are two separate communist groups, Democratic Socialists, chapters of Food Not Bombs and Prison Books, and, of course, tons of liberals. It has made for some interesting news stories, including an anarchist getting elected to city commission twice and a tripod being erected to prevent the building of a Starbucks. Unfortunately, it hasn't meant much in the realm of lively street protests. Until May Day of 2018 that is.

After many years without hosting their own May Day celebrations, in 2017 some organizers decided to stop traveling to Broward and Miami counties and instead have an event of their own. Around 50 people showed up, marched down the sidewalks to City Hall, gave speeches, and then attempted to build community at a local church. While satisfying because of relationships built and because something actually happened in Lake Worth, it was mostly a let down in terms of radicalness.

This year, Florida Immigrant Coalition, Reunión de Grupo de Mujeres Latinas y Más, South Florida Anticapitalists, and other groups linked up to make sure that this year would be more energetic. They quickly drew up a list of May Day demands: Full legalization for all, no wall of death, stop the deportations, end gentrification, and stop police brutality and police terrorism. Another important decision made was to prevent peace keepers from attempting to corral folks onto the sidewalks. It's all too common for events in Palm Beach County to be derailed by a few cop-loving liberals who feel that it's their duty to physically enforce their versions of nonviolence. Even when the anti-Trump marches were at their peak in West Palm

Beach and 7,000 people attended, they were forced back on the sidewalks by these so-called peacekeepers. This year, it was decided the streets would be taken!

By most accounts, the crowd on the balmy, breezy evening was about the same size as the year before, but the energy was slightly more rebellious. Despite the efforts of ICE, Border Patrol, police, and white supremacists, this past year served to build more bonds between activist groups and individual community members, allowing the planning to be more cohesive and inclusive. After a few speeches in Bryant Park, the group—banners in front, Migra Watch on the sides, and cars and bikes blocking intersections—took to the streets.

Only one person—an old white man who shows up to events dressed in American flags while dumping praise on the cops—tried to talk people out of going into the road. It didn't work. After about a 100 yards, the marchers went from blocking one lane of traffic to preventing any cars from passing in either lane. The marches, especially the many children who showed up, were bursting with energy and excitement, chanting “no justice, no peace, abolish the police,” “no trump, no kkk, no fascist usa,” and “la migra, la policia, son la misma porqueria” among many others.

After marching close to the small downtown area, the marchers headed west to the mostly immigrant neighborhood, the most vibrant neighborhood in Lake Worth, where people hang out with their friends and neighbors in front of houses and local businesses. It was at this point that the Palm Beach County Sheriff's office decided to show up. Five cruisers began driving around like they had never seen a march before. Two of them followed the marchers, repeatedly asking for folks to get out of the road and informing everyone that they were breaking the law. When the march rested at City Hall to hear a few more speeches, police walked through the crowd, demanding to know who the leaders were. If one looked closely enough, they would have been able to see the smoke pouring out of the cops' ears, as they tried to comprehend the idea of such an event taking place with no leaders. Eventually, they asked “nicely” for folks to please stay out of the streets for their own safety, and headed back to their running patrol cars.

Requests from the police were ignored and after about fifteen minutes, the streets were once again in control of the marchers. This time, locals from the bars that line Lake Avenue stood outside gawking and taking pictures; some laughing, some shaking their heads, and a few even joining the march. Eventually the crowd headed into a church for burritos, haircuts, and music. Much to the chagrin of everyone in attendance, the police thought they were invited to the party, and before anyone even finished a burrito the church was surrounded by 11 police cars, a K9 unit, and an unmarked vehicle being driven by the captain.

A few of them (the captain included) approached the members of Migra Watch and the legal observer to explain that marching in the streets was illegal, they were there for the protection of the marches, and that their feelings were hurt that no one notified them in advance. When it was explained to them that no one wanted their help and that the reason they weren't called was that just about everyone involved in the march has had horrible experiences with their department, they still didn't seem to get it and kept pressing the fact that what happened

was illegal and unsafe and that they were only there for protection purposes. When they couldn't convince the four folks with whom they were talking to promise on behalf of all the attendees to not to go in the streets again, they attempted to push their way into the church. Luckily, enough people blocked the door, and the pigs went back to their side of the street to huddle.

The police stayed until each and every person left. They followed some cars, they wrote down some license plate numbers, and they took a lot of photos, but in the end they went away without making a single arrest, and that itself is a victory of sorts.

In the context of where and what Lake Worth is, most of the attendees considered this march a huge success. Not a single person remembered another instance of roads in this small town being taken for such a long distance.

If folks can manage to take the energy from this year and figure out a way to get across to folks what standing in solidarity actually looks like, May Day 2019 can bring the city of Lake Worth to it's knees.





Hollywood, FL May Day March for Immigrant and Racial Justice

There really is no place quite like South Florida. Next to the glitzy homes on South Beach and Mar-a-Lago, hundreds of thousands of immigrants work, live, and just try to survive in this so-called United States. As our so-called president continues his assault on immigrants, African-Americans, and so many others, we have come together in solidarity on May Day. Just like our comrades up north in Tampa and Palm Beach, our march did not acquiesce to the commands of the police, nor did we contain our march to the sidewalks. We took the streets, the streets that we had made our own. Our march occurred on the newly renamed Hope, Liberty, and Freedom streets. The former street names in Liberia, a predominantly black neighborhood in Broward, were named after confederate generals. We fought tooth and nail to have these cruel reminders of America's all-too-present racism removed from this neighborhood, which is why we chose to have our march there. They truly were our streets, streets we had reclaimed from the white supremacist government that named them.

As important as our march was, the community that gathered both before and after the march was just as important. Before we took to the streets, we gathered outside, braving wind and rain, to listen to speakers talk about indigenous rights, justice for immigrants, and the fight for 15 movement. Several leftist organizations set up tables, including the South Florida ISO, Miami DSA, and some others. Many individuals and groups brought banners, including the Fort Lauderdale Food Not Bomb branch. Organizers registered people to vote, handed out flyers, and chatted with one another. When we took to the streets, several people with brightly colored vests seemed to be our guides for the protest, but unlike other protest marshals, they did not listen to police commands or give orders, merely walked along the edges made sure we knew when to turn, as our march had a set path along the renamed streets.

After our march, we gathered at an open field to listen to some more speakers, this time, a mother spoke about how the police shot her son, leaving him permanently disabled and how not long after he committed suicide. This talk raised an important issue about how South Florida police departments have a long and bloody history with attacking and killing Hispanic and

black people. While some might use this to disparage Black Lives Matter, the truth is that BLM in South Florida actively works with the Hispanic community in fighting the police violence that pervades their communities. Such an event jam-packed with speakers and marching is exhausting, which is why there was a community barbeque at the same field we gathered at, proving free food to us all. Hot dogs, sandwiches, drinks, and snacks were all prepared and handed out. In addition to food, we also had entertainment from amazing Capoeira performers who demonstrated the incredible dancing slash fighting style that originated from Brazil accompanied by live music.

More than just a protest, this May Day was an expression of victory, a gathering of community, and a place to engage with activist groups and continue to fight. Although this day was a victory for the neighborhood and a call to further action, it was also a time for remembrance. Sylvie, a tireless fighter against racism and bigotry of all kinds, passed away. She had been battling cancer throughout her fight to remove the racist street signs from Liberia, but according to her friends she never stopped fighting. Together we mourned her loss at a vigil held after the event had ended, sharing stories and coming together in her memory. We hope that her memory will inspire countless other activists to follow in her footsteps and stand against tyranny.





If Leftists Follow The Tampa Model We Might Actually Have a Chance

By Dr. Bones

Spend approximately 2.5 minutes on the internet and it will become clear to you: the Left can be the most toxic, hate-filled “community” you’ve ever had the misfortune to experience. Outright lies and willful ignorance abound, and right behind them are usually threats of violence and mass murder. Communists will get the bullet, Anarchists go straight to gulag; the Left often has a lot more in common with warring wings of the Latin Kings, Bloods, Bandidos, and Crips.

Except of course all those organizations are actually feared. They also actually do things, often violent things, and are quite capable of returning on any threat to even a score. They have power and control territories that run across multiple states.

I knew of no leftist organization that could match the tenacity, strength, and cunning of the average street gang. That wasn’t the point. I drove 180 miles into the heart of Tampa Bay to see whether or not the Left was capable of doing anything besides shitpost.

It was May Day, the holiest of days for hearts both black and red. I cracked open another beer, gulping down the frothy brew as I did eighty in a forty-five, reaching for my voice recorder.

“The event has been put on by traditional unions, Maoists, Marxist-Leninists, Wobblies, and the local DSA chapter. It is a perfect laboratory, a window, into the disparate wash of various strains of Leftism. I am unsure of what to expect.” I paused for a moment, watching the trailers and cattle zoom by, as much as piece of the landscape as the acres of oaks, pines, and palms. “The event could be a total wash, an abject failure; it could kick off a riot and potentially get me killed; it could be nothing more than one big hugging match where everybody feels good and goes home as if they’ve actually accomplished something when in reality nothing’s changed.”

Shadowy tendrils began to capture my tone. “Whatever it is...whatever I see out in Tampa today will be of great significance. If anything will happen in Florida, maybe the country....if ever there was an ideal setting for this kind of thing, this is the place. If today comes to nothing?”

I rolled down my window and turned up the cumbía. The thumping tropical beat brought a grin from ear to ear. I set down the empty beer can and reached for another.

“Then...there is no hope. And at that point it won’t really have mattered anyway, would it?”

The assignment started with a simple message. In my inbox, from a name and face I did not recognize, was an invitation:

“Yo are you doing anything for May Day? We’re planning to have a huge-ass event in Tampa and are trying to get leftists from around the state to show up. It’s gonna be militant as fuck.”

I was intrigued. Truthfully I had no plans of my own and had been wondering what exactly I was going to do for May Day. There was no leftist presence where I was, not even an inkling; I knew if I wanted to see real human beings even vaguely challenge the ruling order I’d need to put many miles under my feet.

The location seemed ideal. I had roots in the city and kin buried out that way, having spent the most poverty-stricken years of my youth in nearby New Port Richey. I knew Tampa was big enough to probably draw a crowd and remembered an energy there uniquely suited for revolutionary politics.

Everything in Florida cities revolves around money: Tallahassee is all about borrowing it, Miami is all about spending it, Orlando is all about taking it, and Tampa?

Tampa has always been about making it.

From the late 1880’s all the way to the 1930’s cigar manufacturing completely dominated the local economy, hundreds of firms fighting tooth and claw to outproduce and outmaneuver each other. A proudly immigrant city, Tampa also boasted its own division of the Italian Mafia, and had a stranglehold on every racket, hustle, and scam from Havana to New Orleans. The Tampa Bay mob became notorious early on for a peculiar method of making a point to anyone that stood in the way of profit: a shotgun blast directly to the face, done in broad daylight and right in the street. The violence may be gone, but the killer instinct familiar to hustlers everywhere still survives: Tampa has gone from from cigars and bolita rackets to become the industrial, commercial, and financial hub of Florida’s entire west coast.

Electronics, medical equipment, beer, paint, steel, fertilizer, citrus products, livestock, processed shrimp, all roll through Tampa and its eighteen lines of railway. The port of Tampa handles 50 million tons of cargo every year and, thanks to its status as a “foreign trade zone,” goods can be unloaded for repacking, storage, or transshipment without being hit with additional taxes.

In a state dependent on cattle and tourism, Tampa alone had taken the Capitalist model and ran with it.

That naturally creates problems.

In the Tampa Bay area a black third-grader is half as likely as a white counterpart to read on grade level. Just a few years ago it had the nation’s highest homelessness rate. Tampa, along with Miami, is in the top ten every year for the prized position of highest income inequality in America.

Money, power, corruption, violence. Tampa was the real deal, a quiet powerhouse of global trade long reliant on a dispossessed and oppressed population. No matter what happened I’d at least get a good story out of it.

I just needed to cross the dangerous and uniquely odd territory known as the Floridian interior first.

I lived on the eastern side of the peninsula, and mere miles outside my town lay a vast and unforgiving wilderness. Danger. Death. Dismemberment. Towns long since dropped off maps and shambling, inbred creatures. Concrete castles and roads where cars rolled uphill. A trip through the Florida interior could bring one or all of these things.

Tampa was going to be easy. I could expect electricity, antibiotics, even basic literacy. Even if there was a riot, even if I got arrested, I was fairly certain I wouldn’t get cancer from the water.

No such guarantees exist in the interior. Perhaps that’s what gave Tampa a better revolutionary chance. The rest of Florida was simply too wild, too cutthroat, and too focused on eating one another to give a damn.

After packing up the essentials I hit the road, pushing my Kia Soul well into the nineties and through the swamplands. Dilapidated shacks blended into burnt out churches, strange hovels well outside any building codes or homeowners association. Out here there was no law, save for what you could make with your own hands, and after getting some distance between me and the nearest court house I cracked open a beer and began recording notes.

“Temperature is 85 degrees, humidity in the interior close to 80%. At that level sweat no longer evaporates.” I crossed counties, moving from swamps to towering pines. “The human body’s one defense ends up turning against it, the streams of water pouring down your neck effectively capturing every ounce of heat around it.”

Holopaw came up fast, a town with one stoplight and around 1500 drunk and angry red-necks at any given time. A new street sign said to slow down but it disappeared in a whirl. The sounds of four-wheelers came through the open window, as well as shotgun blasts. Hunched inhabitants sniffed the air, and as I passed by they pointed as if spotting a ten-point buck. Before they could give chase I was long gone, briefly passing a wrecked minivan no doubt ambushed the day prior.

“I’m coming prepared: Gas mask for tear gas, revolver for lethal force. In the event of close combat I have mace and a folding trench knife, a wonderful invention from the killing fields of World War One combining a dagger, skull-splitter, and brass knuckles. Completely legal with...with uh...” To my left a wild hog the size of a Volkswagen was chasing a pack of dogs, a human arm dangling from its tusks. It seemed oblivious to me and the road, this wild creature more akin to a Bigfoot on steroids than its familiar domestic cousins. Nothing but a tank could challenge it here. I watched in awe as it killed two pitbulls, swallowed a third, and as the car finally passed the creature appeared to be mounting the fourth and final pup in act of bestial lust. I pushed the engine upwards as I put the creatures behind me, screaming for no less than ten minutes before I could carry on with my notation.

“...Completely legal with a concealed carry permit, thanks to our wonderful weapons laws. This monster of a tool is affectionately known as a ‘gator paw’ and has gained cult status in some of Florida’s rougher trailer parks. There the weapon is believed to carry the souls of all it has killed, and fighters swear when dipped in Mountain Dew it makes the bearer invincible.”

The town of Harmony surged forward, a massive fake literally built out of a cowfield. No history, no connection to anything, it was playground where small-town aesthetics and townhouse dreams could be had for the low \$200,000’s. The doomed children raised there are almost 10 miles from other people and spend most of their time tearing ass through the woods and getting high.

“This may seem excessive. Let me assure the reader if anything I am under-prepared. This kind of load out is what we Floridians carry to go get gas, shop for groceries, or walk down the hallway to take a shit. The fact I don’t have an AR-15 or AK47 in my car on a journey farther than five miles would be deemed pure foolishness by many of my countrymen.”

A nameless fish camp began to hurtle towards me, million dollar homes and fishing shacks intermingling between two massive lakes that appeared capable of swallowing the sky. The poor were hold overs from wilder days when finding a home in Florida was merely a matter of heading to the woods. They had been pushed out of the cities, or simply abandoned to their own devices, and as such had claim to some of the most breathtaking scenery the state could offer. This wouldn't last, most obviously when the scenery was shore-side as it was here. The presence of three story mansions next to the dilapidated "Not a Clue Bar and Grill" was itself a potent metaphor. As the camp moved from windshield to rear-view mirror I wondered how long it would be before the whole thing was just another Walmart or worse, a Super-Target.

I reached Kissimmee, my halfway point. Cops on motorcycles rolled through the street, all white, and seemed to "accidentally" kick their engines whenever a black person behind the wheel seemed to linger too long. The place was a contradiction of sorts, formerly the rough saloon and brothel infested cousin of Orlando when more cows could be found than people. As the economy shifted with the times so too did Kissimmee. The brothels are massage parlors, the saloons are sports bars, and instead of nickel-and-diming every hick fresh from the prairie they sell "discount" Disney tickets to tourists hopelessly lost. Immigrants may have improved the food, some of the signs may be in Spanish, but everything still reeks of an older and rougher way of life.

Onward, ever onward, I kept my eyes open for the next leg of the journey. After thirty miles or so of trailer parks and wild jungle, I found the road that would take me directly to Tampa.

Now I4 is usually one of two things: a highway that operates at the speed of a tortoise practicing Tai Chi or a bare-knuckle road warrior experience with vehicular manslaughter every few miles. I grabbed more beer for the journey before jumping back on the road, but not before witnessing a peculiar sight: in the parking lot of a Wafflehouse a preacher was administering last rites to a group of soon-to-be weary travelers. The families held each other and weeped, and the robed man himself seemed to tear up uncontrollably.

"Why Lord? Why must our roads be temples to the Devil?" He waved his bible in the air, seemingly buffing the crowd with +2 luck.

"Why must 'is love for carnage and brutality hold sway in your garden of Eden? Save these fine people Lord, protect them on their way to Tampa! Let not the Devil have his way!" Shouts of "Amen!" "Yes Lord!" and "Has anybody seen my wallet?" rose from the crowd.

"Now," the preacher continued, "the collection plate was a little light, folks. So we goin' ta pass it around juss one mo' time..."

With no time to waste I joined the throng heading to the highway. At first the going was slow. Things rapidly began to pick up though, and that's when people started to get pissed. I wasn't the only one itching to go fast and people were treating SUV's like nimble dirtbikes. Lanes were switched, blown over, traded, and attacked; even 18 wheelers violated every traffic law and routinely rode in the left lane. Twice, no three times, pistols were brandished outside windows and I blinked in macabre disbelief as a flock of what appeared to be sand hill cranes attacked a school bus, flayed every child inside alive, began driving the vehicle, and plowed it into a concrete wall at two-hundred miles per hour.

"JESUS FUCK!" I remember yelling, flames and feathers coating the road. "What kind of shit IS this?" I wanted to say prayers for the dead, do something, but it was far too late.

I'd reached Tampa. And with it an entirely new world of dangerous opportunity.

I pulled through Downtown Ybor City, an old neighborhood built in the 1880's and once ground zero to Tampa's immigrant community. Ancient structures once used as houses and cigar shops now offer booze and dancing as far as the eye can see. Neon signs waiting for darkness looked like exposed ribs on dying whales, and an ancient trolley pulled right alongside the road. I was directed to park in the back lot of a union hall, which truth be told felt like being asked to park on a space shuttle launch pad. Florida is a "right to work state," and as such is almost entirely un-unionized. That workers even had a union, much less an imposing structure holding court between oak trees, seemed as strange as a Canadian in Miami without a sunburn.

A small black car pulled up and waved me over. I got out and shook my contact's hand, a young man sporting a black cadet cap and sunglasses. This was Mike, a local who'd gotten into leftist politics about a year ago. He'd hand a hand in organizing today and was the one who messaged me.

After short introductions I was to ride with him to the rally. He noticed I began taking empty cans from the passenger seat, crushing them, and putting them in a grocery store bag.

"Heh. Just uh, had a few beers on the way over. Long drive." The empty twelve pack remained hidden in the back seat.

On the ride there we spoke about the state of Leftist organizing, and how Tampa had been somewhat of a miracle.

"Would you say," I asked, "it's a big difference from uh...internet organizing, which just seems to be scaring the ever-living piss out of one another?"

“Honestly, the most difficult people I find online are PSL(Party for Socialism and Liberation) people, but they have been the nicest people in my experience here.” The night and day difference seemed hard to believe, especially since I knew Leninists that wanted me dead. Mike continued, perhaps sensing my disbelief. “Everything’s so different in real life. People are nicer and people aren’t talking about, you know, whether Trotsky was a revisionist; people don’t care about that. I mean it comes up over beer if you’re like, shooting the shit, but it’s not like a life or death thing like it is over on Twitter. You’re not going to tell someone to go kill themselves.”

I frowned. “So there won’t be some massive, armed conflict today between Maoists and Marxist-Leninists?”

“No,” he laughed. “We’ve all been co-organizing. This is a group project. We’ve been working hand in hand the whole time.”

The event had been two months in the making. Traditionally May Day in Tampa had been focused on traditional union issues and run by the union leaders. This year they’d opened it up, made the entire process more democratic. The injection of young blood quickly swung the perspective from center left to discussions of People’s War. Sensing the rising red tide the more traditional forces handed over control of the event to the young radicals.

“This is kind of like our chance,” Mike said. “We want to be fun, we want to be family friendly, but we also want to be militant. Our perspective is that we’re under attack. This is us standing up and fighting back.”

The city had been notified of the rally, but part of this new found militancy was a march through Ybor City, an event that required official permission, permits, and no doubt the co-operation of Tampa’s police. The organizers had none of those things and frankly didn’t care. “They’re probably going to attempt to keep us on the sidewalk,” Mike shrugged, “but whatever happens, happens.”

Ah, looking back now...there surely must have been agents planted among the pre-May Day unity barbecue Mike had mentioned. Some level of infiltration had to have happened. If what would follow was simply the city of Tampa scrambling, it was very clear they were ready for war at a moment’s notice. That they planned for violence. If Mike and the other organizers had known what would occur...would they have done things differently? How many more flags would have been burned?

The rally was held in a large park, looking to be smack in the center of downtown Tampa. A fountain rose and fell but a few feet away with the laughter of the children playing in it, and all around us huge skyscrapers rose to the clouds. On the concrete, next to the road and under a patch of highly manicured palm trees, appeared what looked like a small camp decked out in red. Above it in the center was a handmade banner with a big fish about to eat a little fish.

“An Injury to One,” it read, “Is An Injury to All”. A school of small, angry fish were painted on the banner with faces ready to carry out that promise.

The camp had a lively atmosphere. These people knew each other, though even a complete stranger such as myself could see a silent divide. The traditional union folk were on the right; on the left, with a larger and younger audience were red shirts and chests decked out in roses. The crowd was decidedly mixed: black and white, male and female, adults and even some kids running around. A young man decked out in camo gear and a mask passed by. He had a conversation with my contact and made his way to a table.

“What the fuck is that?”

“What?”

“I thought you said we weren’t masking up yet?” Mike had told me earlier to wait since they didn’t want to scare any children.

“Oh. Well we aren’t. But I guess he is.”

“Well shit, I am too. I LIKE scaring kids.”

I donned an executioners hood and sunglasses, my head quickly going from vaguely human to horror-film extra. Oblivious of how...different I probably appeared I went and tried to get some interviews.

Looking back I’m not surprised very few people wanted to talk to me. They couldn’t tell who I was, I had no press credentials, and besides wearing something from the purge I was rocking a shirt with an alien, a hammer and sickle, a dolphin, and a nuclear waste symbol. I probably also reeked of beer and gasoline. Commies and Anarchists already make moderates nervous. Here I was pooping in the proverbial punch bowl.

It was time for speeches, and one by one representatives of the varying organizations took the mic and spoke on varied issues. This initial wave of speakers appeared to focus on traditional union desires: healthcare, better wages, job protection. “Labor Unions are not trying to fight class war,” said one, “they are trying to end it.” This continued with a large contingent of the Fight for \$15 crowd and a representative from the local crane operators union. After each speaker the MC, a young non-binary person of color, led a chant to keep the energy up.

Immediately something jumped out at me: the event was being primarily led by women, and indeed the first four speakers were all women. The speakers, and even the crowd, were also overwhelmingly of various ethnicities. These were not people who talked about diversity and did nothing with it. Clearly, an equal footing for all had been important.

The tone of the rally, and of other speakers, immediately shifted when an older Native American man with sage burning behind him took the podium. He was carrying an upside down American flag emblazoned with the dates and names of various massacres. He opened by having a female comrade lead with a prayer.

After the prayer his first step was to apologize for speaking English, a foreign language brought here by invaders. This followed with a discussion how being an American “means nothing” and that calling yourself one or believing in the myth keeps you from “being a human being.” He pointed to police officers now beginning to surround the rally. “That badge and uniform isn’t power, it’s authority! You have the power to deny authority! Power is inside you!” He spoke in vivid and brutal terms, of the tears shed by victims of police violence and the crisis of missing indigenous women. He called the names of the black men killed by police and spoke in no uncertain terms. “If you want change you have to have a consequence.”

He pointed to the police nearby. “They got you thinking voting will be a change. Well SCREW THAT!”

Speakers became more radical, ranging from someone talking about Black Bloc to someone from the Tampa Solidarity Network loudly proclaiming “our enemies are the international bourgeoisie!” The chants began to get heated as well.

“No more landlords!

No more cops!

Worker power can’t be stopped!”

Masks began coming out, signs were being passed. Cops were jumping on the radio. The women leading the event were giving directions, making it clear to all involved there was a march planned and where it would end. Water was passed out to keep people from dying. The masked Maoist was running around asking for a lighter. A pile of flags was picked through and I grabbed a black one. On the side of it was painted a red umbrella.

“That’s a nice flag you got there.” A young woman dressed in black smiled at me.

“Yeah. The symbol has something to do with sex worker solidarity.”

“I know,” she laughed. “I made it.”

“Sid” was a founding member of Tampa’s Sex Worker Solidarity Network. She identified with no political label, no tendency. “Sex Workers live in direct contradiction to the State. Their lives are resistance. So we understand that when we look at people of color, we understand that when we look at immigrants, we understand that when we look at the native people of this land...we don’t see that when it comes to sex workers and that never made sense to me. At the end of the day capitalism created almost all of them.”

Again, I was extremely impressed. Tampa had not only tackled an issue still causing consternation and difficulty in the wider left, but was home to a full blown network providing support, lending aid, and bringing a voice to an entire profession often excluded from the dreams of a worker’s paradise.

Sid believes the leftist message is easily relatable to the majority of the exploited, and as such is extremely dangerous. “Capitalists know that and want to kill us.” She saw Florida particularly as a land divided: on one hand large cities were teeming with people looking for work, all fleeing capitalism, racism, and patriarchy in their own ways; outside these cities lay rural areas that were “basically still living under Jim Crow.” Sid didn’t believe a revolution would happen in her life time, yet here she was fighting for one all the same.

She would get her chance.

It was time for the march and by now no less than twelve police officers had begun to surround us.

Masks were coming on and a young man holding a huge “FIGHT BACK” banner was moving towards the police. The same person who had been introducing the speakers and leading the chants were giving last minute instructions, each with a megaphone in their hands. The crowd began crossing the street, chants simultaneously ringing from left, right, and center of the march.

“The Workers! United! Will Never Be Divided!”

The exact numbers were hard to say, as I was swimming through the middle of red clad bodies. Faces from skyscrapers looked on, puzzled and slightly angry.

It was then, as if by some unseen signal, that the police rolled out in force.

Twenty or so bike cops rolled up in perfect formation, eyes hidden by sunglasses and jaws locked in grim determination. They immediately surrounded the march on each side and actually took up the sidewalk. They made no attempts to move the crowd off the street, but could be seen yelling and pointing at certain people.

“Keep your eye on that one.” I turned to see a muscular arm cloaked in a uniform point directly at me. Had they seen the speedloaders attached to my belt? My thoughts turned to dread. Jesus, if they arrest me they’re going to feel my gun and kill me on the spot. They’ve got us surrounded, could annihilate us at any time. What kind of strategy is this?

The calls and marches continued unabated. Suddenly a large white pickup pulled out from nowhere and parked along side the rally. A masked man leaned out a window, and held a white flag over the side. Stretched across it was a fascist symbol: a black, blazing sun.

“C-communism has...has been responsible for more deaths in the modern era-“

“SHUT THE FUCK UP, FASCIST!” The reply was instantaneous, flying up from multiple people. If the fascist was hoping to scare people he had fucked that up completely. He stammered and seemed to give up on his speech, yelling curses at the marchers. The Leftists repaid him in kind, but spoke with authority. I tried to keep an eye on the action but the tide of bodies carried me away.

I could see a crowd forming around the truck. The cops seemed perplexed, torn between moving with the march and ending a scuffle. I didn't hear the truck leave but when I looked back it was gone.

Before I could ask another scuffle had broken out, this time in the ranks of the police.

"HEY! WHAT DID I TELL YOU?" One officer on a bike smacked the arm of a subordinate that had dropped out of formation. His tone was dripping with rage and fear. "I said five deep at ALL TIMES. What do you not understand? Get back in formation! Do NOT stop!" The victim of the abuse, a younger officer, said nothing but reeked of embarrassment. This temporary break in the facade of control made me wonder who was really afraid of who.

The march was out of the downtown area. By now legions of motorcycle cops had blocked off side streets and refused any traffic entry. As soon as the march reached them they'd speed off, running 30 miles per hour to secure another intersection. Behind them squad cars had lights going. The chants never let up, the organizers never tired. Not one ounce of fear was seen across the faces with the megaphones. Even with police fully armed, not two feet away from them and visibly uncomfortable, did they waver.

"No Ban!

No Wall!

No USA At All!"

The color of their skin meant they would receive no mercy. They certainly knew this. There was an energy there however that seemed...above such petty considerations. They walked and chanted as if victory was assured, as easily as if you or I were walking down the hall.

It felt, if even simply for a moment, that they really did run the street.

We were making our way into an abandoned section of town, rotting buildings and smashed storefronts stretching out beside us. I began to wonder just where we were headed. No people were seen here. Had we been fooled, corralled into some vacant part of Tampa where nobody could hear us?

There was an issue. The Masked Maoist, in the center, had stopped. He seemed to be signaling the march to move past the police line.

"This way. This way people, c'mon. We need to go left." People began slowing down, confused. The people with the megaphone kept moving straight. He had a smoking torch of some kind pouring out red, and he waved it to get attention. I wasn't close enough to hear but it sounded like he was worried they were being kettled. The megaphone wielders perceived some confusion. They doubled back and seemed to be arguing with him. By now three different commands were competing: "move left," "move forward," and a much deeper voice warning everyone to "tighten up."

The wizard in me thought this highly symbolic, a metaphor for the larger Leftist struggle.

The cops seemed as equally confused. I had worried they'd take the lapse in strength as an opportunity to strike, maybe machine gun us from the air or set loose attack dogs, but they legitimately looked bewildered. The bike cops stopped and the unmounted officers standing in the distance didn't budge. Some unseen agreement had been made between the divided forces of the Left and the march continued forward. The chants went back up and the momentum quickly returned.

We'd moved past the empty destruction and were making our way through low income housing. People began to come out of their homes to watch, small children holding the clothes and legs of nearby parents. Their faces looked astonished. I wondered what this moment would be like in their memories ten or fifteen years from now, a sea of red hammers and sickles, chants about fighting back against racist police. Some of them waved but most simply watched, unsure of what to make of the little revolution.

The next leg of the journey was jarring. We crossed from low income housing to a semi-abandoned section. What buildings were being used were all trendy businesses, micro-breweries or high-end barbershops selling nostalgia for top dollar. The bourgeois came out to stare at us, saying nothing. They were the front lines of the capitalist invasion, economic settlers with waxed mustaches pushing the natives farther and farther away. Unlike the previous neighborhood they were also overwhelmingly white.

It was practically hallucinogenic in effect, Capitalism and racism so neatly boiled down and made manifest. You could stop and stare at a neighborhood left to rot, no doubt constantly harassed by the forces of the State, and by merely turning your head glimpse into the trendy hipster future destined to evict them all. Tampa had money to make and nobody was going to get in the way of that. The city had a long history of demolishing such neighborhoods and scattering their inhabitants, all to create "trendy" new homes for "young professionals." It was like seeing Ponce De Leon's ships in the flesh.

And I realized I'd already seen it: the fish camp I passed on my journey to Tampa. Was not the struggle the same?

We were deeper in Ybor now, the abandoned buildings giving way to row after row of restaurants and bars all designed to make good money on tourist dollars. Ybor from this perspective seemed like nothing but a hollowed out shell, a place Tampa had bought and pimped out for cheap; it was the same bullshit part of town designed to soak up as much money as possible, easily seen in Miami or Orlando, simply coated with a uniquely "exotic" and historical sheen:

Ooooh! Look here! Isn't this building old? Cubans used to live here, make cigars! Neat, eh? Say, how about another \$13 cocktail for you and the misses? Have you seen the wild roosters that walk around town? We're trying to get rid of them but you can buy this t-shirt with a picture of one for \$20!

A call came from the front: "Sit down! Sit down! Form a circle and sit down!"

The command came from the megaphone leaders. The marchers gathered about in a circle and sat to possibly stop traffic. This would have been fine except there was none due to our police escort, and instead it became a vivid message to the wealthy in Ybor. People began funneling out of restaurants, bars, wondering just what the hell the racket was.

One can only imagine the effect a mass of young masked people bearing communist symbols must of had on them. Silence reigned from the audience, and even those who shook their heads did so without any direct challenge to the forces claiming the street. For one beautiful moment Ybor had been put on notice. The only thing that could have made it better was the addition of black pirate flags and a Kalashnikov in every hand.

As a young woman loudly detailed the reasons for us being here the Masked Maoist produced several American flags from a bag. He had a lighter. I looked up at the police as he struggled to fight the breeze. They made no movements, never broke perimeter.

Crazy bastards are probably waiting for it to catch flame, I remember thinking. Call in the fire marshals to hose us. I can see the headlines now: "Commie Arsonists Stopped by Local Fireman; 15 Dead and Many Broken Bones; City Wide Celebration to be Declared."

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Finally, after an extreme struggle and switching out for another flag, the Red, White, and Blue was in flames right in the heart of Ybor's streets. Cheers went up inside the circle and I was perplexed that the police remained motionless.

They wouldn't for long.

Suddenly a man from the street came up, walked calmly into the circle and stomped out the fire.

"Nope. No, I'm not going to let you do that."

In an instant the one Black Bloc member was on him, like a mosquito running at a naked baby lost in the everglades. The masked comrade gave him a fearsome shove and right away others joined him. The Maoist himself seemed ready for combat. Fists were raised. If blood would soak the streets of Ybor the Leftists were ready to defend themselves with the same ease a professional mercenary dumps white phosphorus on unsuspecting villages.

A female police officer broke up the scuffle, snatching the flag-worshiper and dragging him off. There was no attempt to grab any Leftists nor even to stop them. The interloper disappeared and the call came to rise. The march continued loudly, triumphantly.

Until we hit a small park, the end zone, one covered with wild roosters. All the chants suddenly stopped. Immediately. Even as the megaphones continued the people seemed finished with what they were doing. It was eerie, like a switch being flipped.

The job was done and everyone was tired. In the park tables of various organizations were waiting and vegan tacos had been prepared to feed the hungry masses. As the different organizations who'd taken part in the march hawked their ideologies I snuck off to the side to think and take notes.

By any admission today had been a feather in the cap for Tampa's Leftist scene. Multiple groups, ranging from the PSL, to the IWW, to Tampa Dream Defenders, even a class conscious wing of the Green Party, had successfully come together in pursuit of a larger strategic goal. The crowd was all radicals, and the traditional labor forces were nowhere to be seen. Revolution, not piecemeal reforms or concessions, had been the singular desire parading through the streets of Tampa.

They were somethings that worried me. For one the decision by many to come bald-faced and simply put on a mask when the march started was tactically unforgiveable. If anything had happened those unsuspecting comrades would go hook, line, and sinker. I had noticed the police early on with their own cell phones out. Some at the park had demasked, and seemed oblivious to the fifteen cops that still had us entirely surrounded. For better or worse the May Day marchers would now be well known to the local pigs. Have we forgotten Ferguson?

"Crawford was found shot to death Thursday night in his car, just like activist Darren Seals in 2016 and protester DeAndre Joshua the night of the Ferguson verdict in 2014. The latter two had gunshot wounds to the head and their cars were lit on fire."

Revolution is not a game. The State plays for keeps and what was peaceful today can get quite violent when nobody appears to be looking. Sure, everything was nice when we were all equally powerless but what about later?

This too made me wonder about how solid the co-operation among the march really was. At the end of the day each political entity claiming victory sought power. Given the opportunity I wondered how long such brokered peace might last. In the event of a radical wet dream and Tampa equally split between all present...would they turn the fight against one another? Were there multiple answers to the question of “what is to be done” or would the One True Vision need to be accepted by all?

Just how well an Egoist might suffer under a Red Tampa? Cries to “smash the state” from people literally advocating to replace it with a new one put a stick in my craw. When conversations drifted to the “highest form of struggle” or “most evolved theory” I respectfully listened and believed none of it. The individual is unique as is every single moment lived by them, and as such can never be reduced to the dictates or decisions of any one party or ideology. “In every party that cares for itself and its persistence,” said Max Stirner, “the members are unfree (or better, unown) in that degree...The independence of the party conditions the lack of independence in the party-members.”

If these people were looking for converts they wouldn’t find one in me. I must have my own song only I can sing, and refuse allegiance to any flag but my own.

And yet...that wasn’t being demanded. As if to confirm this something very interesting began to happen right before everyone went home and after all the speeches were made. AG, the young person whose voice and determined attitude had introduced every speaker, made the crowd aware of every action, now asked that everyone gather in a circle and hold hands.

Maoists, Anarchists, Marxists, and even Green Party stood hand in hand. AG and their friend Jason held the center.

The following chant was special AG said, and one they believed they’d never do again until today. They’d watched it be stolen and become gentrified, even used cheaply at an anti-gun rally. Everyone was made aware that the following words would hold great power.

“Look at each other and commit yourself: ‘It is our duty to fight for our freedom.’”

The circle responded. “It is our duty to fight for our freedom!”

“It is our duty to win!”

“IT IS OUR DUTY TO WIN!”

“We must love and support one another!”

“WE MUST LOVE AND SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER!”

“We have nothing to lose but our chains!”

“WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR CHAINS!”

The chant went like that for several rounds, each round building in rage and energy, with AG practically howling for the final one. The crowd joined in earnest, and as night fell the entire park vibrated with the combined voices of all present. Hand in hand no petty differences divided them. There were no parties. People who cared for one another stood as strongly as the oldest tree in a cypress dome.

That was the great power, the same thing that took my breath away and had Tampa’s police worried. Here, unlike so many other corners of the globe the oppressed called home, everyone from Anarchists to Maoists had decided to fight together against their common enemy. They didn’t waste precious time on theoretical disputes; it wasn’t about what specific flavor or flag you happened to prefer. Folks in Tampa instead are building actual solidarity networks, planning events, threatening power, and making the exploited aware that they need not suffer. Together, regardless of party affiliations and ideology, they could figure a way out. Tampa may have had a past but everybody was focused on winning and living in the present.

The ritual closed with AG saying the words “ashe.” Ashe is often mistaken as an African version of “amen.” It is in fact a philosophical and religious concept, similar in some ways to the Tao, through which the Yoruba people see as fueling all power to make things happen and produce change. It is given by Olodumare, one aspect of the Supreme God in West African religion, to everything — gods, spirits, humans, animals, swamps, rivers, seas, and stones. Existence, according to the Yoruba, is entirely dependent upon it. There is evidence it is older than the Egyptian mystery cults.

May Day in Tampa didn’t end with the resurrection of former leftist victories or battles. It closed with a potent ritual demanding immediate change and unity through love from the very foundation of the universe. Our freedom hadn’t been pleaded for or stolen, but was commanded to exist by the same forces responsible for the very manifestation of life itself. The same forces running through the trees, the roosters, and the very buildings capital had stolen from the people.

I wondered if the god Esu, perennial rebel against orthodoxy and keeper of ashe, was here among us now?

The time had come to go. I thanked Mike and drove him back to his car. After calling my wife to let her know I was alive and well, and picking up a few more beers, I traveled through the Floridian interior under a moon as bright as the sea is salty. There was no traffic and all was quiet, the insects rising across the road my only companions. I thought about the same force that gave them life, forever present and inextinguishable, coursing through the veins and souls of those wonderful comrades in Tampa.

Perhaps it went both ways. Maybe even here, among the wild hogs, pill mills, and Jurassic wildlife that made Florida so unique, revolution waited just under the surface. Maybe it really was everywhere.

All we needed was to speak our own ashe into life, wherever we were. To maintain it, develop it, and above all look beyond the confines of ideology....

....towards the hearts of the people and land that we love.



